

From: John R. Wolfe [mailto:jwolfe@igc.org]
Sent: Saturday, March 04, 2006 7:51 PM
To: MLPACComments@resources.ca.gov
Subject: MLPACComments: Spearfishing Contests in SMCAs

All the proposed Central Coast MPA packages allow recreational fishing in State Marine Conservation Areas (SMCAs) in south Monterey Bay and Carmel Bays. This small region is the most popular diving area along the western United States for non-consumptive recreational SCUBA divers. Natural unexploited underwater habitats are highly valued by non-consumptive recreational divers - it's tremendously exciting to discover enormous rockfish, cabezon and ling cod while diving.

In providing marine life protection, as well as recreational and research opportunities consistent with Goal 3 Objective 1 for the Central Coast, Package S falls far short of Package 2. Package 2 protects with State Marine Reserves (SMRs) the heavily dived areas from Breakwater to Hopkins, off Pacific Grove, and along the reefs east from the Pinnacles past Pescadero Point to Pescadero Rocks and Dali's Reef. Like all the packages, Package 2 also has SMCAs at Pacific Grove and Carmel Bay that allow recreational fishing - but unlike Package S, Package 2 includes an important SMCA fishing regulation: while spearfishing is allowed, spearfishing contests are banned.

Spearfishing contests in SMCAs disgrace the very term "Conservation Area." Such contests:

1. target big reproductive fish - that is, the "big mothers" (contestants score 1 pt per pound) . This both undermines fish populations' reproductive capacity and exerts genetic pressure to select for smaller size.
2. target biodiversity - competitors are rewarded for killing rare species (contestants score 10 pts per species) - such as the large Treefish shot at the May Pacific Grove contest this year - ditto for the four large Vermillion rockfish taken at this year's contest in Carmel Bay.
3. "shoot the scenery" - removing large rare fish of great value to non-consumptive recreational users at heavily used shore-accessed dive sites ('sharing the resource' does not mean a handful of spearfishermen can remove all the large fish that hundreds of divers would otherwise enjoy viewing).
4. undermine the conservation ethics of reasonable sustainable take for consumptive users
5. favor a very small minority of divers who participate in spearfishing competitions, over all other divers, as these contests strip large fish from popular shore dive sites.

A survey of local Monterey dive shops estimates that only 5% of dive shop customers spearfish (see file attached for details of that survey). And only a small fraction of spearfishing divers participate in spearfishing contests. Yet those spearfishing contests deny hundreds of recreational divers the opportunity view and photograph large fish that would otherwise frequent the reefs along the most popular shore dive sites of Pacific Grove and Carmel Bay.

These contests have an enormous impact on small heavily-used reefs - taking out hundreds of large long-lived fish within a few short hours (typically 1,000 to 2,500 lbs of fish). The impact on the fish populations is obvious to any diver diving these reefs before and after the contests. The contests revisit the same reefs every two or three years.

A "no spearfishing contest" rule for nearshore SMCAs in the Pacific Grove and Carmel Bay SMCAs would be widely supported by the public, and by the great majority of recreational divers. This

regulation should be part of any Package that purports to honor the spirit and intent of the Marine Life Protection Act.

Respectfully submitted,

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ESTIMATED PERCENTAGE OF CUSTOMERS PATRONIZING MONTEREY BAY DIVE STORES WHO SPEARFISH

Protocol:

Interviews were conducted in person by John Wolfe, except for 3 phone interviews on July 17 and 19. Care was taken by interviewer not to reveal interviewer's position on the subject.

If asked, explained that the purpose of the study was to inform the MLPA initiative.

When percentages were estimated by dive shop employee, the interviewer would translate it to a fraction. For instance, if the stated estimate was 5%, the

interviewer would check the percentage by saying "so, about 1 in 20 customers, then, you'd say?" and look for confirmation or a change in the estimate.

At some point in the conversation, interviewer would ask if employee spear fished (appeared to have a strong influence on the estimated percentage).

Spear fishing for halibut on SCUBA was the most frequently reported type of spear fishing done by dive shop employees (not necessarily customers).

To weight the different dive shops by number of customers patronizing each dive shop, the employee would be asked to estimate the number of sales

on an average summer weekend day. Sometimes they would confuse the question with total sales per day - when they offered average total sales

on an average summer weekend day, the dollar amount correlated well with the estimated number of customers per day.

Some employees or owners explained that Saturdays were busier than Sundays. If so, average of Saturday and Sunday was estimated.

Store owners and managers were assumed to be more familiar with the customer base, and so their estimates were given twice the weight of other employees.

Dive Store	Employee	Status	Employee Weighting	Date Interviewed	Estimated % of Customers Who Spearfish	Estimate times Employee Weighting	Spearfish themselves?	Estimated # of customers on an average summer weekend day.	Customers times Spearfish Percentage
Aquarius Breakwater	A1(*)	employee	1	16-Jul-05	50.0%	50.0%	yes		
	A2	employee	1	17-Jul-05	10.0%	10.0%	no	75	
	A3	owner	2	19-Jul-05	6.0%	12.0%	yes	105	
	Store Weighted Total		4			18.0%		90	16.20
Aquarius Del Monte	B1	employee	1	16-Jul-05	10.0%	10.0%	yes		
	B2	employee	1	16-Jul-05	10.0%	10.0%	no	100	
	B3	employee	1	16-Jul-05	4.0%	4.0%	no		
	B4	owner	2	19-Jul-05	5.6%	11.2%		30	
	Store Weighted Total		5			7.0%		65	4.58
Bamboo Reef	C1	manager	2	9-Jul-05	20.0%	40.0%	not any more	45	
	C2	employee	1	9-Jul-05	10.0%	10.0%	yes	30	
	C3	employee	1	9-Jul-05	33.0%	33.0%	yes		
	Store Weighted Total		4			20.8%		40	8.30
Manta Ray Dive Center	D1	owner	2	9-Jul-05	5.0%	10.0%	no	150	
	D2	employee	1	9-Jul-05	10.0%	10.0%	yes	150	
	D3	employee	1	16-Jul-05	2.0%	2.0%	no		
	D4	employee	1	16-Jul-05	3.0%	3.0%	no		
	Store Weighted Total		5			5.0%		150	7.50
Monterey Bay Dive Center	E1	manager	2	16-Jul-05	0.5%	1.0%	no	450	
	E2	employee	1	16-Jul-05	0.5%	0.5%	no		
	E3	employee	1	16-Jul-05	3.0%	3.0%	no		
	Store Weighted Total		4			1.1%		450	5.06
(*) This spearfishing employee estimated that 50% of his "regular customers" spear fished, not counting beginner divers, but also stated that many more beginner divers passed through the shop than "regular customers." He refused to make an estimate for all customers.							Total:	795	
This may skew total results upward. If his estimate is reduced to 30% for all customers, then total weighted percentage for all stores drops to 4.7% (1 in 21)									
							Weighted average % of customers who spearfish:		5.2%
							Number of divers per spearfisher:		19